The Commentator: Six Decades as the Voice of the Students

1935-1995

On March 1, 1935, the students, faculty, and administration of Yeshiva College began publishing the undergraduate newspaper that they continue to publish to this day. As a student I always looked for the publication where I got my start in journalism, notes Art Goldman, Features Editor, 1969-70. "It was more than just the experience running the publication, the Commentator." Goldman, like many former editors, notes that "Comminie gave me a forum to say what I wanted to and gave me the confidence to say it." Among his memories from those college years are "my first byline, my first threat of a libel suit, and the onion rolls with sweet butter at Ratner's at three in the morning after putting the paper to bed." Goldman's Editor-in-Chief at the time, Rabbi Robert Fagin, lauds the Commentator for being "a vehicle through which I polished my writing and editing skills," abilities he did not acquire as a physics major. "It helped me do well in law school," and "it was a great club, in effect." Goldman notes that "sometimes there's exaggeration - more than sometimes. When you read a college newspaper you have to realize that sometimes what students write which are perhaps not as important as they'd like to think, while other issues that are more important fail to inspire them. Hence, you read the criticism with a critical eye." Although at times "journalism behaviours itself" and "occasionally editors went overboard and were terribly destructive," in their quest to become "young Woodwards and Bernsteins," the editors' actions brought great good to the university. "There was one particular time a number of years ago where we were besieged by an individual of quite reactionary point-of-view who was carrying on a number of issues." In that respect, he says "What The Commentator has to do - or in a sense continue to do - is to point out those areas where we fail to live up to our promise, fail to fulfill our mission, and to encourage us to do better." The administration looks to The Commentator "as a barometer," even though "sometimes there's exaggeration - more than sometimes. When you read a college newspaper you have to realize that some things agitate students which are perhaps not as important as they'd like to think, while other issues that are more important fail to inspire them. Hence, you read the criticism with a critical eye." Although at times "journalism behaviours itself" and "occasionally editors went overboard and were terribly destructive," in their quest to become "young Woodwards and Bernsteins," the editors' actions brought great good to the university. "There was one particular time a number of years ago where we were besieged by an individual of quite reactionary point-of-view who was carrying on a number of issues.

Racism and Cheating Articles

Exercising freedom of speech and of conscience should be a newspaper editor's goal, says Rabbi Lamm, but "at all times you have to remember that it is the function of a Yeshiva College student to participate in a Chashel Hashemit. And that can happen very easily." Several times this year alone, The Commentator's Governing Board has been on the receiving end of much derision for publishing articles that cast YU in a negative light. Rabbi Lamm says, however, that a continued on page 12
The 1930's

BY JOSHUA M. FELDMAN

The United States has George Washington, the Zionist Movement has Theodor Herzl, The New York Times has Adolph Ochs, and The Commentator has Moses L. Fuerst. On March 1, 1935, Volume one, issue one of The Commentator rolled off the press with the name Feuerstein reading as the very first editor-in-chief.

In the 1930's, this fledging four page newspaper proudly reported on Yeshiva College's growth over the years. An attempt to open a new business school dominated the front page in a late April issue - YC's first attempt at expansion planned for the Yeshiva College School of Business. The school was to be started in September of 1935. "The administration believes that the room is in industry today for the really well-trained Jewish businessman, and that graduates will be readily absorbed by Jewish firms. Hence it seeks to produce a fully developed and well-rounded personality integrating in the curriculum the liberal arts requirement and education the student needs for an appreciation of Judaism, its culture and spirit." noted the newspaper.

However, with the glory of a campus newspaper came the controversy that still surrounds us today. Issues of appropriateness arose from both students and the administration. Editorials over the years included the development of Palestine and the Histadrut, the death of the Nunan Bill and dismay at the administration for refusing to take part in the Rambam festival. It was this last editorial that took the newspaper into its mission every two weeks trumpeted the ongoing of campus clubs, student councils and Yeshiva sports teams.

It is hard to imagine a Commentator-published four page newspaper today. Issues in early 1940 proclaimed, "Belkin announces the addition of graduate schools. Yeshiva College became an accredited University. As we look at the decade it is amazing to see that the issues and stories that made their way to the pages of the Commie in the early '40s are no different than stories we read today. One issue in early 1940 proclaimed on the front page "Study to be Made of Student Spirit." A more amusing anecdote from the early years is the inception of the "wake up committee," a contingent of sophomores who one day decided to go door to door one morning and wake the school for 7:30 minyan.

Amid student council events, basketball game box scores and reports of new professors arriving on campus come stories of a new faculty-student library committee and a dinner room committee. Additionally, the YC Players performed "The Wolves" in Lamport Auditorium, the school's first dramatic production.

Resolved: That President Roosevelt be reelected for a third term.

Birth of a Newspaper: The Early Years (1930-1949)

1935-1949

The 1940's

BY JASON BORSIN

As The Commentator headed into its second decade of existence the paper settled into its assigned role. A simple four page edition every two weeks trumpeted the ongoing of campus clubs, student councils and Yeshiva sports teams. In fact it seems that the issues and stories that made their way to the student body were no different.

Indeed this very wish arrives several years later as The Commentator hailed the arrival of the State of Israel with tremendous front page spreads including a reprint of Israel's Declaration of Independence.

The 1940's provided a balance for The Commentator between reporting the stories of the campus and incidents of the world as it affected Yeshiva College, the center of Orthodox Judaism. It is amazing to look through the decade and spot many of the legendary names from the annals of Yeshiva history; the decade is filled with landmark events within the college and personalities which shaped the school we attend today.

A piece from an early issue of the decade quotes a speaker by the name of Dr. Isaac Breuer who says, "Torah must guide life" in an address to the students. In November of 1942 a young promising coach named Bernard Sarachek is named to coach the basketball team and the following year a new school president named, Dr. Samuel Belkin. Belkin would continue to lead the University until his retirement in the late 1970's.

University Expansion

As the decade progresses the school begins to grow. In 1945 the paper proclaims, "Belkin announced Yeshiva Expansion Program To Be Financed $5,000,000 Drive." The expansion fund was aided by a $1000 plate dinner (that's without Al Gore). In 1948 the school announced the plans to establish a medical school and later that year the school had its first Chanhukah concert, the first of what was hoped to be a yearly event.

Indeed the 1940's was a decade of prominence for Yeshiva, with expansion and the addition of graduate schools Yeshiva College became an accredited University. As we look at the decade it is amazing to see that fifty years ago many of the concerns of the student body were no different than they are today. Fortunately, for the first time, this newspaper was there to cover ten years worth of a lifetime.
The 1950's

by Mieke S. Ziecher

Remember the 1950's? Okay, maybe not firsthand. But you've heard all about this wholesome time. The decade that brought us clean family fun like Father Knows Best and Leave it to Beaver. The decade that saw the havoc inspired here? Well, not exactly. After all, kickoff events no longer take place at Weber's Alehouse, Purim Chagigahs don't feature wine, beer and cigarettes (they don't include music either, but that's another story), and jokes about sex do not appear in front-page Commentator interviews.

Then again, there were some surprisingly stringent regulations, at least by contemporary standards. Students today wage the perennial struggle between cozily warm bedsheets and the spiritual duty of blowing smoke. The arguably exact solution, though, students weren't just thinking this year's Senate was strict. They could call their own, and the manpower, nor the technical skill at their disposal to do the job required. We are forced to recommend that if correction is not made in the immediate future since the toilets are practically unusable, they be locked altogether, cited a December 1951 editorial. Improvement attempts to alleviate these problems as diverse as M.D.'s, math Ph.D.'s and Social Work degrees. But the most relevant development for YC students was the inauguration of a division limited to those with a specific chromosome pattern. "College for Girls Opens: Freshman Class has 32," proclaimed The Commentator in September 1954. "We were very impressed by the spacious dorm rooms and we readily visualized the innocent girlish faces that would soon be peering from behind polished desks," recounted a reporter who in May 1954 investigated the school, four months before it opened.

Perhaps realizing that the addition of a women's institution required supplying YU students with the means to attract these students' attention, the Albert Einstein College of Medicine opened with 56 students in 1955 (more than enough to satisfy students' failings are prevalent now, how about a Commentator editor in Chief, and a robust 50% couldn't name the president of the student council.

The campus newspaper paid a price for its candor, choosing not to print the 1957 Purim issue after a controversy erupted. And when administrators intervened to prevent the printing of a sensitive editorial, it resulted in the following ultimatum from the editors in an April 1958 issue.

"The right of The Commentator to print articles, news stories and editorials on any problem which are not limited to the college has been denied by Dr. Simeon I. Guterman, dean of Yeshiva College and concurred in by Dr. Samuel Belkin, president of the University... The Governing Board has voted unanimously to suspend publication of The Commentator under this ruling. If the ruling is not rescinded there will be no Commentator." And indeed, the remainder of the academic year brought no insightful news nor vivid features from the YC journalistic wellspring.

Perhaps most perplexing of all 1950's Commentator stories was the headline-grabbing minyanage of 1958. Several years earlier, dorm supervisors instituted a policy wherein minyan-conscious counselors would make the 7:30AM rounds and attem[/root]pose students from sweet slumber. The situation came to a head in March 1958, when the following article appeared on the front-page of The Commentator.

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The 1960's

by STEVEN MIO DowNik

The Commentator of the 1960's is the archival repository for a defining era in human history. Although we can no longer bear the din of that decade's relentless campus construction or the cries of protesting students, the emotions of that turbulent time can still be heard through the pages. The Commentator, a student publication, served as a voice for the generation. We can peek into the minds of those who lived through those times, and into the minds of those who lived through those times, and into the minds of those who lived through those times.

November 15, 1962 brings news of the rebirth of Hamesvar, a newspaper that is "not a competitor" of The Commentator. On December 4, it is reported that all students boycotted the cafeteria last week to protest the administration's refusal to allow YCSC vending machines in Furst Hall. January 2, 1963 is the first time The Commentator reports on the Student Senate, but certainly not the last. As detailed in the February 19 issue, four YC and Stern students will appear on G.E.'s College Bowl TV Show before a national audience. The students are finally selected and on May 8, The chairman of the announcing body, "YU will play the University of Louisville before America on Sunday at 3:30. Initial talk of a $15 million Science Building being erected at the Main Center is revealed to the students.

The Commentator was founded for the avowed purpose of cementing student opinion towards all undergraduate and institutional problems that directly concern the student body.

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The More Things (1960-1965)

-Commentator Editorial, 1935

accomppanied by an artist's rendering of the structure "in the air" on October 24, 1965 issue.

Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir's address to the students of Yeshiva University is related to the students in the November 20 edition. But bigger news - of October 21, 1964 - is that of the imminent construction of a $2.6 million dormitory to be dubbed Morgenstern Hall, but to be known colloquially as the "New Dorm" for several years. More construction news comes in the September 30, 1965 issue, in which plans to erect an architectural library building are revealed to the students.
The 1970's

BY COMMENTATOR STAFF

In addition to YCSC's and the YU administration's efforts to solve the exorbitant fees charged by the school cafeteria by introducing their "budget meal" plan, a nutrition packed combination of delicacies which included a main meat dish, two vegetables, bread, and a choice of soup, drink, compote, or pastry, all for $1.35, a number of issues of great importance occurred during the early 1970s.

One issue that rocked the campus was the feeling that the university was moving away from its religious ideologies and becoming more secular. On March 25, 1970 Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, in a Chag HaShanah address, called upon the university administration to reverse its trend toward secularization. The Rav was worried that a student might challenge the college requirement to enroll in a religious division of the university - a requirement no longer compatible with the Yeshiva's secular status. The Rav warned in what was reported as a "veiled threat" that if the secularization did not stop he "would no longer have a place in this yeshiva." The Rav was criticized by many for not fully grasping the financial implications of the situation.

On May 27, 1970 The Commentator reported that as a result of President Richard Nixon's decision to expand the Indochina War into Cambodia, and four killings at Kent State University which resulted from a protest of that policy, students at Yeshiva College joined students from colleges across the country and terminated their semester three weeks earlier than usual. In a student referendum on the issue, 84.3% of the nearly 1000 voters agreed to permit students to withdraw from courses and receive a Pass or letter grade in a course if their work justified it. To be eligible for the "emergency academic provisions" a student was required to sign a statement to the effect that he felt morally compelled to direct his efforts to activities other than the daily educational process.

September 16, 1971 brought news that same day, The Commentator reported that Dr. Sheldon Socol was named as chief university fiscal and business officer. Socol predicted that the decrepit financial condition that the university was in could be corrected "in a year or two of belt tightening."

Tremors of possible dormitory fee and tuition hikes grabbed the front page of The Commentator's March 24 issue. The initial plan called for $150 tuition increases for those that were currently enrolled in the university and a $200 jump for incoming students. One month later, a modified version of the initial proposal, was made official. The first tuition increase since 1969 was attributed to "rising operating costs by the inflationary spiral in the nation and enabling the university to provide the special caliber and scope of the undergraduate education characteristic of YU."

High School seniors across the country were concerned that a student might challenge the college requirement to enroll in a religious division of the university - a requirement no longer compatible with the Yeshiva's secular status. The Rav warned in what was reported as a "veiled threat" that if the secularization did not stop he "would no longer have a place in this yeshiva." The Rav was criticized by many for not fully grasping the financial implications of the situation.

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The Eighties, they say, was the “Me” decade. Thin ties and hostile takeovers dominated Wall Street, Datsuns dotted our nation’s highways, and the sound of synthesizers and Euro-punk filled the radio airwaves. Things have surely changed in the past sixteen years — right? Well, the Datsun is defunct and Euro-punk is no more (thank goodness), but the hostile takeover is making a comeback, bringing the ties with it, and people now make millions by recording symphony-like pieces on a synthesizer (i.e. Yanni).

Life today differs only slightly from sixteen years ago, and many issues of importance back then, remain in the forefront of debate today. Looking at the first issue of The Commentator in the 80’s, one notices five major articles connected to one topic. Would you hazard a guess as to what the controversy was about? Collect ten points if your answer was the Student Senate. Yes, even then the Senate sparked reactions from all sectors of the student body, and among the various op-ed pieces either supporting or calling for immediate disillusioning of the Senate, were the actual issues being discussed. The first concerned various honors awarded at graduation such as cum laude, summa, and magna, and the grade point averages needed for each. The second, concerned a plan being discussed. The first concerned various honors awarded at graduation such as cum laude, summa, and magna, and the grade point averages needed for each. The second, concerned a plan for combat student cheating. The guidance booklets passed out included the cheating offense into two categories, and its complexities had to be explained by The Commentator. Type A cheating meant the stealing of an exam or its equivalent and Type B included all other forms of cheating, crib sheets, note passing, copying, etc. A category A offense called for immediate dismissal from school. A category B offense caused the student to receive an F on the exam as well as a note, explicitly stating the event, placed in his record folder in a sealed envelope. The note was temporary, pending the student’s ability to avoid cheating (or at least getting caught) in the future, and was removed upon graduation or application to graduate school.

A student found guilty of a second type B offense saw the old note as well as any previous offenses. They also made the student’s ability to avoid cheating or at least getting caught in the future, and was removed upon graduation or application to graduate school.

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In the early 80’s the editors of The Commentator viewed its role in the following manner: “If a tree falls in the forest and there are no reporters present to cover the crash, not only is there no sound- there is no forest as well. There were significant stories in the early years of YU that were not disclosed. For the public they never existed. Conversely, the minor issues which were publicized received unbelievable amounts of attention. Such is the inherent and chronic myopia of journalism.”

At the end of the early eighties, in December of 1985, The Commentator was once again reporting on the issues that divided the campus. Lance Hirt questioned the need for appointed senators in his article “Student Senate: Seventeen Years in Retrospect. Is It Dispensable?” In 1986 they went on to question the need for dorm counselors.

Later that year they featured the administration’s proposal for an amusement mall on Amsterdam Avenue and the local opposition it provoked, and reported on faculty measures to cut back on cheating.

Finally, in 1989 The Commentator was designated an All-American Newspaper with five marks of distinction by the Associated Collegiate Press, bringing a glorious ending to a tumultuous decade.
The 1990's

BY ARI D. HIRT

In this first half of the '90s Commentator headlines featured the near collapse of the Revel School of Jewish Studies and the sponsorship of a Yeshiva University student-run student union, unquestionably the paper's most significant and almost revolutionary innovation, however, took place in its production.

In the same way the Kennedy and the '60s launched NASA, and cable television's 1980-globaled Hollywood, the '90s introduced The Commentator to the world of desktop publishing.

The date was October 31, 1991 (Halloween) when chair of the student newspaper, Oshinsky and layout editor Jay Bailey courageously abandoned the clumsy and outdated cut and paste layout sessions in favor of more efficient computer technology. They proposed that the new production would save The Commentator $800 per issue.

But believe it or not, more than the budget savings, it was the incredible potential for time savings that served as the paper's impetus for change. And boy, did it ever.

In The Commentator's first 55 years layout sessions alone lasted over three days; today, layout is completed in a day's time. Yesterday's jigsaw puzzle process involved submitting the fully edited articles to the typesetter who would return the text in sheets of columns. The editors would then spend the night cutting out the articles and attempting to literally fit the pieces into the given space.

Today, not only do we minimize or enlarge fonts to all sizes at will, but we are also able to edit and polish articles simultaneously to layout.

The new structure bolstered the paper's efficiency as well as its aesthetic quality and also allowed for The Commentator to confidently call itself a biweekly newspaper by consistently printing an issue every two weeks. In any given five year period, The Commentator has never published as many issues as it did from 1991-1996. And in this half decade The Commentator has covered, witnessed, manufactured, and broken enough news and controversy to last two decades.

The Cafeteria, under new management, was the first to rock the boat in the early '90s when the University's financial decision to phase out its Judaic Studies program in higher education called the Bernard Revel Graduate School. The first headline appeared on December 11, 1992 reading "Revel Grad School Faces Shutdown." The students, behind the push of The Commentator, high-

gan to uncover stories which apparently confronted the mandatory meal plan $300, from $1000-$3000. Student objection even persisted in a Commentator article reporting the grand opening of the Caf Store on Oct. 23, 1991 - apparently students were worried that the caf store would put the Yum-Yum Shoppe out of business.

Revel

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ly objected, viewing such an action as a diminishment from the university image of being a center for Judaic studies.

A week later The Commentator published a special edition titled "YU Community Challenges Revel Decision." The edition included a signed petition on the back of the paper. The December 30 issue reported that the YU Board of Trustees would reexamine the Revel decision as over 250 students began daily picketing at Furst Hall, "Save Revel Now!"

Two weeks later, January 13, the Revel protests continue, but now students start to block the main entrance to Furst Hall. Finally, April 7th, after three months of student protest, the YU Board of Trustees voted to maintain the Bernard Revel Graduate School with 32 courses. Also emerging out of this fiasco is an initiative to bolster student administration and dialogue. The students are promised to be involved in all major decisions that affect all aspects of student life.

Challenges to Orthodoxy

Starting in 1993 The Commentator be-

his professor for an 'A.' But while these issues primarily did not affect the students' daily lives, The Commentator reported on stories thread-

ed with a common theme "NOT at YU."

In the Fall of '93 YCSC President Daniel Gurel removed all Kol literary journals from student mailboxes after discovering that inappropriate language was used in two of the students' essays. However, in the April 17, 1992 edition The Commentator printed a unique editorial lambasting the director of Facilities management Jeff Socol. Never before had The Commentator written such a personal editorial, and Rabbinic authorities were properly consulted before such a personal assault was taken.

Not only has Socol been generous in generating news but so has his security guard - or should it be "er" security guard. In the march 4, 1992 Commentator the front page headline read "Muss Thief Caught." This thief turned out to be a former Burns Security Guard who became desperate for cash after he had become a drug addict. Then, only one month later another 'thief' was caught. However this crook, who had been working the Morg dormitory, was not a security guard but rather a friend of students who would spend $500's in Yeshiva. One additional time, students had found themselves tied to a security issue in The Commentator when the headline read on October 31, 1990: "Security Raids Dorms, Stops BB Shooters - Five Students Caught and Disciplined." But students more frequently make the news for their positive and benevo-

lent actions. Whether it be a Soviet Jewry rally in Washington DC attended by over 800 YU students, or a "Speech Major Places 7th in A&T Investment Challenge," the story is guaranteed to be covered in The Commentator.

As the '90s near to a close, The Commentator continues to advance in journalism on both the writing and production fronts. The Commentator already has its own site on the Internet, and soon all issues will be readily accessible through computers across the globe. The word "yeshiva" has changed so drastically, and so will take place in the '90s that were not necessarily tan-

ged in controversy. For example, nev-

er before has the face of YU's adminis-

tration changed so drastically, and so

ly objected, viewing such an action as a diminishment from the university image of being a center for Judaic studies.

A week later The Commentator pub-

lished a special edition titled "YU Com-

munity Challenges Revel Decision." The edi-

tion included a signed petition on the back of the paper. The December 30 issue reported that the YU Board of Trustees would reexamine the Revel decision as over 250 students began daily picketing at Furst Hall, "Save Revel Now!"

Two weeks later, January 13, the Revel protests continue, but now students start to block the main entrance to Furst Hall. Finally, April 7th, after three months of student protest, the YU Board of Trustees voted to maintain the Bernard Revel Graduate School with 32 courses. Also emerging out of this fiasco is an initiative to bolster student administration and dialogue. The students are promised to be involved in all major decisions that affect all aspects of student life.

Challenges to Orthodoxy

Starting in 1993 The Commentator be-

his professor for an 'A.' But while these issues primarily did not affect the students' daily lives, The Commentator reported on stories thread-

ed with a common theme "NOT at YU."

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